

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY



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No. 490

NEW YORK, MAY 19, 1906.

Price, Five Cents

THREE TIMES IN PERIL

~OR~
NICK CARTER'S BUSIEST NIGHT

by THE AUTHOR
of "NICK CARTER"



Nick was seized from behind, a heavy cloth was thrown over his head, his arms fastened to his side, and then he felt himself being carried into the vault, where he was dumped on the stone floor.



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THREE TIMES IN PERIL

OR,

Nick Carter's Busiest Night.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

ONE CRIME, OR TWO?

Six million dollars gone!

A splendid fortune lost to the widow and daughter of the man who had won it in honest business enterprises.

It was a difficult problem which confronted Nick Carter that morning, and he was hardly in the mood for puzzles of the character of the one presented.

He had figured on leaving at noon for his summer home up the North River, but here was the pretty daughter of Edwin Westfield setting for him a hard task.

For many years previous to his death Edwin Westfield had been one of the detective's closest friends.

During Nick's absence in Europe, Westfield had died suddenly, and under peculiar circumstances, leaving a

fortune of six million dollars—the fortune now reported lost.

At the time of Westfield's death the doctors and the newspapers had assigned heart-disease as the cause of his sudden demise.

There had never been an investigation, the widow being opposed to an autopsy. The body of the husband and father had lain in the family vault at Greenwood for six months.

And now came the daughter of Edwin Westfield, saying, between her sobs, that Adrian Miller, the administrator, who had been given a remarkably free hand according to the terms of the will, had dissipated the great fortune, that her mother and herself were without the barest necessities of life!

Rich all their lives, they now faced absolute want!

Not the want of a servant or a gown. The want of bread and a bed!

Nellie Westfield was a remarkably attractive girl.

Nick realized the peril of such a child—innocent to all the ways of the world—entering the selfish struggle for bread and butter. Her mother was an invalid.

There was nothing for the detective, in loyalty to the memory of his dead friend, but to do all in his power to recover part of the lost money if it were possible to do so.

The finding of lost fortunes was hardly in Nick's line. He preferred more exciting cases.

He little imagined that pleasant morning, when the sobbing girl stood before him with an appeal for assistance on her lips, that he was entering upon one of the strangest and most dangerous cases of his long career.

"I can't understand how Westfield came to name Adrian Miller as his executor," said Nick. "Miller is not my too well liked in the circle in which your father moved."

"It is all explained in the will," said the girl. "They had some sort of business together."

"Edwin Westfield in partnership with Adrian Miller! That seems impossible."

"Oh, they were together a great deal during the last few weeks of poor papa's life," said the girl.

"I can't understand it," said Nick. "Do you know anything of the nature of this business?"

The girl shook her head, saying that she knew nothing of any of her father's enterprises.

"But Miller had complete control of the money?"

"I think so."

"And when these affairs mentioned in the will were closed up, your mother and yourself were to share the money?"

"Yes; that is what the will says."

"You had an attorney when the will was probated?"

"Certainly."

"His name, please?"

"Mr. Robert Porter."

"Who introduced him to you?"

"Mr. Miller."

"Ah!"

Nick paced the floor a moment.

The case was growing fast.

"When did Miller bring Porter to you?" he asked, seating himself.

Nick knew Robert Porter for a swindler, and he began to see something more than bad management in the sudden disappearance of the Westfield millions.

"Why," said the girl, in answer to the question, "I think it was the very night papa died."

Another sharp exclamation from the lips of the detective, and he settled back in his chair prepared for almost anything.

"Were Miller and Porter in the house the night your father died?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"At what time?"

"Just after father was found dead in the library."

"And not before?"

"Oh, no; not before."

"Why do you say it in that way?"

"Well, mother objected to Mr. Miller, and father did not bring him to the house."

"Why did she object to him?"

"Well, I can hardly say. She saw that he had a remarkable influence over papa, and often expressed the fear that it would lead to evil—as it did."

"How would you describe this influence?"

"Oh, I can't describe it. Father seemed fascinated by the fellow."

"I see. Now, let us begin at the night of the death of your father. Did you see your father on the night of his death, before his death?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where, and when?"

"It was in the hallway, about ten o'clock. I met him at the door as he came in. He kissed me before going into the library."

"Who saw him after that?"

"No one saw him alive after that."

"He was found dead at midnight, the papers stated by your mother. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he say to you as he passed into the library?"

"Oh, something of no consequence."

"A compliment, eh?" asked Nick, with a smile.

"Yes, sir. He said he was about done chasing around evenings and would soon settle down at home with his daughter."

"Did he say where he had been that night?"

"Yes, he said he had been closing up a deal with Miller."

"Ah!"

"Why are you asking these questions?" demanded the girl. "Will it all help to get the money back?"

"It is a most remarkable case," replied Nick, "and we must begin right. There may be something worse than mismanagement here."

"I don't doubt it," said the girl. "I believe Adrian Miller equal to anything."

For just an instant the famous detective allowed the thought which was slowly forming in his mind to show in his face, and Nellie Westfield read it in his eyes.

"I know now what you mean," she cried. "I know now what you think. You are going back to that time to show that papa did not die of heart-disease!"

"Hush!" said the detective. "You must not permit such thoughts to enter your mind. We are just at the beginning of the case."

"I can't help it," said the girl. "I know what you think, and I believe you are right. The electric chair is none too good for Adrian Miller."

"It is an awful thing to charge a man with murder."

The girl did not speak.

"What else did your father say?" asked Nick presently.

"He said that he had a lot of work to do, and must not be disturbed, no matter who called."

"And that was all?"

"Then he went into the library and closed the door, and I never saw him alive again."

"What was the first thing done after your mother discovered that your father was dead?"

"There was an awful time. Mother fainted, and I had all I could do to prevent the servants leaving the house in fright. I was going to the phone to call a physician when the door-bell rang."

"Who went to the door?"

"I did. The servants were paralyzed with fear, and had lost their heads. I hoped for assistance of some kind, and ran to the door as soon as the bell rang."

"The commotion in the house might have been heard by one standing in the street?"

"I think so, sir."

"Exactly. Whom did you find at the door?"

"Adrian Miller."

"Ah!"

Again that quick exclamation, again the swift pacing of the floor for a moment.

"What reason did he give for being there?" asked Nick.

"He said that he had neglected to give certain important papers to father. He had them with him."

"Exactly. You saw him before the death of your father was made known to him. How did he look, how did he act, as he stepped into the hallway, under the lights?"

"He seemed to be anxious. I recall now that he was pale, and that his voice trembled."

"And after he was told of the sudden death?"

"Why, he just took charge of everything."

"He called Mr. Robert Porter?"

"Yes, sir."

"He called physicians?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many?"

"Two. He seemed to know them both perfectly."

"And he called the coroner?"

"Yes, sir."

"They were there all night? I mean the two attorneys and the two doctors?"

"I think they were."

"In the library?"

"Yes, sir."

"They would naturally have access to all the private papers there?"

"I have never thought of that, but they certainly would."

"And Porter took charge of the papers?"

"Yes, sir. Oh, it was an awful time. Mother was ill and helpless, and I was nearly crazed with grief. You may well understand that the lawyers had their way about everything."

"Who were the doctors?"

"I do not know."

"Anything peculiar about either of them?"

"Oh, yes. One looked like a crazy man. His cheeks were so hollow, and his shoulders so bent, and his fingers so like claws, and his eyes glared at one so that I was frightened of him."

The detective gave another sharp exclamation. The case was progressing!

"What did the doctors say that night? What did the coroner say?"

"At first there was talk of suicide. There was a glass of water at father's elbow, and they pointed at that sus-

piciously. But by and by the doctors examined it and tasted of it. They said it was just water."

"There was no inquest?"

"No, sir. Mother couldn't endure the thought of so much publicity, and everything was managed as quietly as possible."

"Perhaps too quietly," muttered Nick, under his breath.

"And then," continued the girl, "the will was probated, and Miller had everything his own way, and he was kind to us for a time, but later he said the money was all gone and we must move."

"Who signed the papers they brought to the house for execution?"

"Mother, of course."

"And she signed everything they brought?"

"I am afraid so."

"And since leaving the old home, where have you lived?"

"We have lived and worked in the most frightful places," said the girl, with a blush of indignation. "We have been cold and hungry, and I have been pursued and persecuted in the street while looking for employment."

"While you still lived at the house, did you see much of Miller?"

"Why, yes, he asked it as a favor and moved there. He had a room on the first floor that used to be mother's, and took his company there. I have seen the doctors there many times."

"Very good friends, were they?"

"Oh, I have heard them quarreling brutally."

CHAPTER II.

BREAKING THE LAW.

"So the doctors and the lawyers quarreled, did they?"

Nick asked the question in a quiet tone, but it was evident that he awaited the answer with no little impatience.

Nellie hesitated.

"What did they quarrel about?"

The girl seemed answering the question in her own mind before placing it into words.

But neither question was destined to be answered at that time.

Nick stood in front of the door connecting the private room with the outer office.

This outer office resembled more than anything else the outer chamber of a lawyer's suite.

The walls were lined with books, and half a dozen bright-looking young fellows were hard at work at roll-top desks.

There was a private elevator connecting this room with the main corridor on the ground floor, and there was an entrance from the hallway which ran through the big building on the fourth floor, but there was no lettering on the door, and one entering from the hall would have no idea what sort of a place he was getting into.

As Nick stood at the connecting door the sound of a voice unfamiliar in the outer office reached his ears, raised in protest at first and then in anger.

He listened for an instant with his head bent to the panels of the door, and then turned the knob and entered the office with so quick a motion that a young man who was standing with his shoulder against the panels on the other side almost fell into his arms.

The young man thus unbalanced was Nick's clerk, and he seemed to have been standing there to prevent a visitor entering the private room by force.

This visitor was dressed in the loud clothes affected by the Bowery tough, and his pimply face showed signs of dissipation.

There were rings under his eyes which were almost expressionless.

He seemed the typical dope and cigarette fiend.

But with all the telltale signs of the rowdy about him, there were outward indications that the fellow considered himself to be about the correct thing in the masher line.

His hair, parted in the middle, protruded from both sides of his forehead in coarse masses, far beyond the peak of the plaid Bowery cap placed on one side of his head.

He wore a glossy collar, a loud tie, his shoes were neatly polished, and, with his shoulders set well back, he carried himself with a jaunty air which expressed satisfaction with his own appearance.

He started back when the door opened and Nick Carter stood before him. His pimply face became almost pale.

He moved toward the door with an eye always on the detective.

Not so very many years before Nick had landed him in Sing Sing for burglary.

"What do you want, Pete?" asked Nick.

"W'y, I just comes up to see me frien'," was the

reply. "I don't know youse runs de joint, see—an' I just comes up to see me frien'."

His tone was at once tough and apologetic.

"Who is your friend?" asked Nick.

"De goil wot just comes up here. She's me frien'."

A dangerous light grew in Nick's eyes.

He recalled what Nellie had said about being followed and persecuted while seeking employment.

"She's your friend, is she?" he said.

With a quick fling he cast the tough into the inner office, where he stood looking into Nellie's face, frightened and actually ashamed.

"Ask her if she will proclaim her interest in you here?"

Nick was evidently very angry at the insult which had been offered to the daughter of his old friend.

Nellie moved toward the door as the tough faced her.

Dandy Pete, as he was called, resolved to brave it out.

"Howdy?" he said, with a grin.

Nellie turned her frightened eyes to the detective.

"Who is this man?" she asked.

"Have you seen him before?" asked Nick.

"Many times."

"Where?"

"He has followed me on the street."

"She's me frien'," repeated the tough.

Nick moved nearer to the fellow.

"Aw, come on, Nell——"

Nick stopped the fellow with a threatening gesture.

The girl's flushed and indignant face told how false was the accusation. Even Dandy Pete's ugly face revealed the falsehood to the keen eyes of the detective.

"You know that you are lying," said Nick. "Apologize to the girl."

Still resolved to brave out the awkward situation, the tough took off his cap, with a mock bow.

"Nell knows," he said, "but I apologizes."

He was in deadly fear of the detective, but nervy still.

Nellie shrank farther away, not even replying to the insulting words coupled with the mock apology.

Nick stepped forward and took the tough by the collar.

"You are ready for another trip up the river, I suppose?" he said.

Pete turned paler than ever. It was an established truth among all the crooks of the city that Nick Carter never bluffed.

"On de square, I apologizes," he said, in an entirely different tone and manner. "I don't know dis rag, see?"

"Why did you follow her here?" demanded Nick.

"He has followed me wherever I have gone for weeks," broke in the girl. "Take him away. I'm afraid of him!"

Pete wiggled himself loose and made for the door. Nick watched his efforts there with a smile. It was securely locked.

"It's up the river for you," said Nick, as Pete turned back, terror showing in his face.

"Say, you goin' to lock me up?" Pete demanded. "Hones', I ain't done a t'ing. On de level, see?"

"You left your marks on the West Side the other night," said Nick carelessly.

"Hully gee! You c'n railroad me, fer sure, but I didn't do it," said Pete, in an agony of fright. "You goin' to lock me up?"

"That depends on how you answer my questions," said Nick. "First, who set you to shadowing this girl?"

"Now, see here——"

"That will be enough."

Nick stepped to the door as if to summon an officer. Pete almost groveled before him.

"Hully gee!" he cried. "You don't give a feller no time to t'ink. You've got de rats to boundin' in me belly, fer sure."

"Who hired you?" repeated Nick.

"It was Archer."

"Ah!"

The parts of the case were coming together in the mind of the detective. The pattern of crime was forming in his brain.

Archer was a go-between.

When a man of assumed respectability wanted dirty work done he went to Archer, and Archer passed the job on down into the slums, to rowdies like Dandy Pete, as he was called.

Archer claimed to be an attorney, having an office on Nassau Street.

He had already been caught in various crooked deals, but had in some manner managed to escape a prison sentence.

Adrian Miller, the administrator, associated with Robert Porter! Now Archer enters. Perhaps Miller knew about that, too.

"Who hired Archer?" asked Nick.

"Archer don't give that out, see?" was the reply.

"You know," insisted Nick. "Shall I call central station?"

"Hully gee!" howled Pete. "Here's where I get mine, good an' plenty. I'm not next, see? I'd put you wise if I could, bet yer life. Can I go now?"

"If you come back to-morrow and tell me what I want to know."

"Here's w're I get sloughed," said Pete. "Archer wants me laid away, an' he's spottin' me. It's me for the shoe shop."

"Will you come?"

"See here," said Pete, his nerve all gone, "if I coughs, lo I get out of town? You lets me go?"

"Sure," said Nick.

"Miller hires Archer."

"I knew that before," said Nick.

"Den wot you stringin' me fer?"

"Who else is in the deal?"

"Dey don't let me in, see?"

"All right," said Nick. "You are wanted out West somewhere. Get out to-night, without seeing Archer or Miller, understand?"

The tough appeared overjoyed at the permission.

Nick knew that he would go without informing his employers that Nick Carter was working in the interest of the Westfields, and that their dirty work had been discovered.

Pete disappeared and Nick turned to the wondering girl.

"Does he tell the truth about Miller?" she asked.

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it," was the reply

"What does it all mean?"

"Robbery."

"And murder?"

"That is for us to learn."

Nellie covered her face with her hands.

"It was murder," she said. "I knew it was murder when I saw that look in your eyes not long ago. Father was murdered! Murdered! Oh, can't something be done?"

The girl was almost hysterical in her grief.

"You may be mistaken," said Nick.

"Mistaken!" echoed the girl, now thoroughly aroused. "Then why should Miller wait outside the house that night, ready to enter and take charge of everything before we could summon our friends? He was waiting there. I shall believe it all my life. He was waiting

there for signs of distress from the house. Waiting to know that his awful deed was done!"

"But your father died of heart-disease, my dear girl," said Nick. "Remember that he had left Miller more than two hours before his death. How, then, could Miller have killed him, sitting, as he was, there in the library, alone?"

"Oh, I can't answer your questions," said the girl. "I know that father was murdered. I shall never forget it. And the hand that struck him down has robbed us! Oh, cannot something be done?"

"I shall do my best," said the detective, "but you must not expect too much. There is no proof against Miller, remember."

"Oh, but he played his cards well," said the girl, anger showing in every line of her handsome face. "He took charge of everything before we could reach our friends, and he brought a confederate to us to be employed as our attorney. Now he has me tracked and followed about the city. I have been blind, or I should have seen all this before."

The girl had indeed summed up the case fairly well, so far as it was possible to do so. The points brought out by the detective during his questioning of Pete and herself had taken shape. Perhaps they had presented to the mind of the detective the same conclusions, but if this were true he remained silent on the subject.

"You are sure no one visited your father in the library that night?" he asked presently.

"Certain."

"And he did not go out?"

"He never even opened the library door. He worked there alone until he died."

"What was done with the glass of water which was found at his elbow?"

"It was thrown out."

"By whom?"

"By one of the doctors."

"Before the coroner came?"

"I think so."

"Now, you say that Miller quarreled with the doctors. Can you recall one word you heard them say during these moments of anger?"

"It was about money, I think, for they didn't agree about what they talked of and sometimes made threats. I was blind not to have suspected something."

Nick pondered for a moment.

Another point had been gained.

But how could Miller be suspected when Westfield had died alone, in his own library, hours after seeing any person except his own daughter?

And yet, how was it that Miller was there at the house at that unusual hour? How was it that Porter was ready to answer his call? How was it that Miller had associated himself with scoundrels from the first night of his custody of the Westfield property?

Why had he caused Nellie to be persecuted?

But there was another question which was more important than all the rest.

How had Edwin Westfield been induced to make such a will?

There was the place to begin.

At the making of the will.

There was where Miller had started, and every step should be followed.

Nick Carter began to realize that he had a hard case on his hands.

"Do you know the names of these doctors?" asked Nick, after a short silence.

"I do not, but one of them signed the certificate of death, I was told."

"Now, about this doctor who frightened you. You would know him again?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Is the old home occupied at the present time?"

"Yes. I think Mr. Miller lives there."

"You say he used a room on the ground floor which was your mother's. Why didn't he use the library?"

"He seemed to avoid the library."

"Had a horror of it, do you mean?"

"It seemed so to me."

"Then that room may still be in about the same shape it was on the night your father died?"

"Oh, yes. It was not molested while we were there. Whatever can you mean by these questions?"

"Did your father ring for water that night?"

"No, sir."

"Where did he get the glass of water?"

"From a bottle he kept in an ice-chest hidden in the wainscoting. You remember that hidden closet?"

"Perfectly. Do you know whether that ice-chest has been cared for since that night?"

"I am sure it had not been touched up to the time we left."

"Then that bottle of water may still be there. The same from which your father drank?"

"It may be."

"Now," said Nick, "you must not remain where these toughs can molest you. When you leave here go straight to your mother. Go with her to my place in Jersey. You know where it is, but to avoid all chances of trouble or mistake I shall send a man with you."

The girl assented to this arrangement, expressing her gratitude more in looks than words.

After the departure of Nellie the detective summoned Chick.

"We have another tough proposition," he said. "We must begin by smashing the law."

"That's easy," laughed Chick. "What law do we smash, and when?"

"To-night," was the reply, "we must burglarize a house and rob a grave."

"That is a cheerful prospect," said Chick.

"And it must be done with all the skill of professionals,"

Chick laughed.

"Professionals," he said, "usually leave some trace for the benefit of the officers. Where is the house which we are to break into to-night? I hope there are no whiffet dogs there."

"It is the old Westfield house, on Fifth Avenue."

Chick emitted a whistle of amazement.

"It has come at last, has it?" he asked.

Nick looked the question he did not ask.

"Some days ago," explained Chick, "I had occasion to look over some papers which held the name of Adrian Miller, the executor of the Westfield estate. I got a pointer there, and followed it, knowing that you were interested in the family."

"What did you learn?"

"That Miller has recently disposed of large blocks of bonds and is about to leave the country."

This was important news.

Anything done in the way of recovering the Westfield fortune must be done without delay.

"Why didn't you tell me of this before?" asked Nick.

"I reached the end of the investigation only to-day."

"I see. Well, Westfield's estate is ruined. We must not permit Miller to leave the country without an accounting."

"How can we prevent it?"

"There may be a way, after we have inspected the Westfield vault at Greenwood."

"Do you mean murder?"

"I mean nothing. We are on the hunt. That is all."

CHAPTER III.

AN EMPTY CASKET.

"But you suspect murder?" said Chick.

"Well," said Nick slowly, "that was a strange will."

"A forgery?"

"It may be."

"A forgery protected by murder?"

"It may be."

"Then we may as well get ready for a hard fight, for Miller is as game as you find them."

"He's a devil," said Nick. "Think of his stuffing his pockets with six million dollars belonging to Mrs. Westfield and her daughter, and permitting them to walk the streets hungry. He's got his coming, all right."

"But how could Westfield have been murdered?" asked Chick.

Nick shook his head.

"Well, his death never followed naturally the making of such a will—a will squandering a fortune, for it amounted to that to give it into the hands of Adrian Miller."

Nick would express no opinion.

"And yet," continued Chick, "Westfield died alone in his own library at midnight, two hours after he had looked upon a human face."

"Correct," said Nick.

"I give it up," said Chick.

"We have just begun, replied Nick. "The case just begins to look good to me. But we must be off to the cemetery."

"And the burglary?"

"We can take care of that later."

"What do you expect to find there?"

"Water," was the brief reply, and the two detectives made ready for the expedition of the night.

When the city hall clock sounded ten, they were at the cemetery where the Westfield family vault was situated.

They hitched their horse some distance away and entered the place by a side gate which was seldom used, but which was not far from the Westfield vault.

There was no moon that night, only the light of the

stars, and now and then this failed, as clouds drifted over the sky.

The streets and alleys of the cemetery were heavy with shadows, and the trees and shrubs stood up against the sky in indistinct masses.

The alley down which the two detectives moved was so dark that they were obliged to feel their way whenever a cloud drifted across the face of the heavens.

In the distance the lights of the city shone clear and distinct. There was a slight breeze blowing off the ocean, and the leaves of the trees rustled with a ghostly sound which was by no means reassuring in that place of the dead.

In a measure the low whisper of the leaves drowned all individual sounds, making it easier for the detectives to do their work without fear of betrayal by such noises as are common to progress in such places.

"I feel like a bank robber," said Chick, as the two men paused in the thick shadow of a huge elm-tree.

In a moment he added:

"I am thinking of all the ghost-stories I have ever read. See how the white gravestones and the tall monuments shine out and fade into the darkness as the clouds come and go."

"I am thinking of enemies more substantial than ghosts," said Nick, moving into a cluster of shrubs that lined the alley.

"What's up?" asked Chick.

"You remember a rig that passed us, three miles back?"

"Certainly. White horse. Covered carriage. Two men inside."

"Correct. The rig stopped at the road-house and came on behind us again, passing just before we turned toward the side road leading to the back gate."

"Yes; I noticed that."

"Well, the rig is out there now, just beyond that cluster of evergreens."

"How do you know that?"

"Didn't you hear the low neigh of the horse?"

"I heard a horse neigh, but there is nothing to show that it was that white horse."

"You are wrong, my son," said Nick. "Horses have voices just like human beings, only not so fully developed. One who cares to pay a little attention to such things can distinguish the neigh of a horse as readily

as he can recognize the voice of a human being. It was the white horse that neighed out there."

As the detective ceased speaking the low neigh came again.

"There it is again," said Nick, "and that shows that the horse is standing there. The men we saw in the carriage are probably in the cemetery."

The detectives listened intently for a moment, but the steady murmur of the leaves and the sighing of the wind sweeping in from the sea drowned all other sounds.

Indeed, any one watching them might have approached very close to the spot where they stood without fear of discovery.

"I can't understand this," said Chick. "Why should we be followed out here?"

"It looks pretty good to me," said Nick.

"I can't see it in that way."

"Why," said Nick, "it's a guide-board, pointing us on. The fact that we are watched shows that we are on the right track. Who caused Nellie Westfield to be watched? Miller. Would an innocent man do that? He probably had some one watching Pete, who is not always reliable, and was informed that Nellie had visited my office. Then he set spies on me. Would an innocent man do that?"

"Oh, there's robbery and murder in this case, all right," said the assistant.

"I'm not so sure of the murder part of it," said Nick, "though it looks mighty strange, but there is no question of the robbery."

"We shall know more about the murder part of it when we get the body of Edwin Westfield," said Chick. "You are looking for poison, I presume?"

"Or a wound which might have produced death."

"But the coroner was there. He would have noted such a wound."

"There are fatal wounds which are well-nigh invisible from the surface," said Nick.

The detectives had no difficulty in getting into the vault. Nor were they in any way molested while there.

After securing the iron door of the vault from the inside so that the lock of the inner door, which was of plank, might not be used to fasten them in, the detectives took down the casket supposed to hold the body of the dead millionaire.

As they tipped it slightly in handling something rolled down the interior incline.

"That's strange," said Chick.

"It means," said Nick, "that there is no body here." And so it proved.

The casket was half filled with stones.

They had been packed in wet sand, but this had shrunk away now, and the stones were loose.

"Where was this done?" said Chick. "How long has this casket been empty of all save stones and sand?"

"Ever since it was brought here," said Nick, examining the fastenings by the rays of his dark lantern. "There was no body here when the funeral services were held."

"How do you know that?"

Nick lifted a death-mask from the casket and held it under the light of his lantern.

For an instant Chick felt like screaming.

The face was that of Edwin Westfield!

It had been arranged in the casket so as to deceive even the mourning widow and daughter.

Being under the glass, no one could touch it, and so it passed for the face of Edwin Westfield.

There were all the trimmings which had surrounded the face, lying in the dry sand.

Nick made them up into a little package, together with the death-mask, and placed them in his pocket.

"It is devilish!" muttered Chick, when the horror of the thing had in a measure passed off. "Think of that awful substitute lying there for the mourners to take their parting look of."

"To think that so keen a man should have left such a trail behind," mused Nick. "It seems almost incredible."

"It is beyond my comprehension," said Chick. "Why should they remove the body from the casket?"

"Possibly with the idea of forever putting incriminating evidence out of the way."

"But even in case of murder," said Chick, "embalming fluids which would destroy all trace of poisoning might have been used. This juggling with the body seems to me to be unnecessary."

For an instant there flashed before the mind of the detective Nellie Westfield's description of the doctor whose half-insane face had so frightened her. That gave him a new clue, but he said nothing about it at that time.

"There is more devilry on foot than we know anything about," he said. "The criminals have at least left us something to work with."

"Yes," said Chick, "no one could have done this but those in charge of affairs at the house just after the death

of Westfield. It all points to Miller. I wonder where his spotters are now?"

"Before Miller sleeps," said Nick, "he will know of our visit to this place, and he will know what we found. This means that we must act without delay. This man, Miller, you see, knows just what we are after. For once, however, a cautious man has been too cautious, and luck has been with us, which is a big thing in opening up a new case."

"Yes," replied Chick, "if he had not had Nellie watched and followed to your office we should not have suspected half so much, and if he had not caused us to be shadowed out here we should not have been so certain that Miller had a hand in the removal of the body. As you say, we are starting in on the case with the fates working with us."

"Don't be too sure of Miller," replied Nick. "He may be innocent of everything save the looting of the fortune. Remember that he is mixed up with a lot of tough people who may be doing things on their own account. Look there!"

While talking, the detectives had been standing at the door of the vault, but in the shadows of the great pile of marble. As Nick spoke the clouds drifted away and the surrounding objects were made clear by the light of the stars.

He saw two men, who had been walking along the driveway, spring to the shelter of a line of evergreens.

"Whoever they are," whispered Chick, "they evidently do not intend that we shall leave the place unmolested."

"Keep in the shadow," said Nick, "and move to the left. We will leave the vault door open. Make for that thicket of evergreens and get your gun ready. I will remain on this side. If you hear anything doing over here get a quick move on. We may be able to bag these fellows."

Chick moved away, and Nick remained in the shadow of the tomb. He heard a movement in the shrubbery in which the men had disappeared, and bent forward as if to pierce the gloom which enveloped the place.

As he did so he was seized from behind, a heavy cloth thrown over his face, his arms fastened to his side by what appeared to be a running noose, and then he felt himself being carried forward into the vault, where he was dumped unceremoniously on the stone floor.

In an instant he understood that his opponents in the great game of life and death going on had been more

cautious than he imagined. The men he had seen on the driveway were not the only ones with whom he would have to figure.

He had been captured without being given a chance to strike a blow or make a sound which would bring Chick to his rescue, so he knew that three or four husky men must have had a hand in the affair.

He wondered whether Chick had also been captured. If so, and the men meant murder, why, the Westfield case was likely to be his last. He knew that he could not depend on Chick, as there were five or six to one, and so he began planning to help himself.

After throwing Nick on the floor the men huddled about the entrance to the vault. Nick could not see them, for his face was still enveloped in the heavy cloth, which appeared to be heavy bagging, but he could hear them talking in guarded tones.

The first thing to do was to get the use of his hands, and this was not so very much trouble, as the noose had not been securely fastened. The men with whom he had to deal were evidently not familiar with the methods of kidnapers.

His hands once free, Nick carefully removed the cloth from his face. Then he could see at the entrance to the vault four figures outlined against the starry sky. They seemed to be waiting for some one, or for something to take place. Nick's notion was that they awaited the capture of Chick. The men seemed to believe the detective hard and fast in his bonds and paid little attention to him.

Presently a pistol-shot came from the thicket in which he had directed Chick to conceal himself, and Nick knew that the battle was on. Three of the men in view darted away, leaving one on guard at the door of the vault. Another shot came, and another, each one seemingly farther away, and Nick was comforted with the thought that his assistant was making his escape. He knew, too, that the shooting would bring the cemetery police to the spot.

Still, he might be murdered before help could arrive. He understood that he could be saved only by quick work, and instantly a plan came to him. He took from his pocket the death-mask of Edwin Westfield, and with it a bunch of lucifer matches. Rubbing the matches over his hands he applied them to the mask. In a moment the mask glowed like a face of fire.

Backing away into a distant corner of the vault, after

leaving the cloth in such shape as to convince a casual observer that it still enveloped a man, Nick continued the work of applying phosphorus to the mask until he heard a rush of footsteps coming toward the vault.

When the entrance was darkened by the rushing figures Nick, from a dark corner where his body was out of sight, lifted the mask high in air. There was a howl of fright, but the men stood their ground. For an instant Nick feared that the men who had been sent out to the cemetery knew of the placing of the death-mask in the coffin.

But this was not the case, for they stood their ground for only a second, and then ran away. Nick was sorely tempted to fire a parting shot at them, but it would be nothing less than murder to shoot them down, even though they would have taken his life, and he refrained.

As the rush of footsteps died out Nick heard a shrill whistle from across the driveway. He replied at once, and Chick was soon at his side. He started back when he saw the mask, still shining with phosphorus, but realized in a moment how the enemy had been put to flight.

"Quite an idea," he said. "I guess those fellows think they saw a ghost, all right, and are likely to keep on running until morning."

In a moment the sound of galloping horses came clearly upon the still air.

"There comes the night patrol," said Nick, "and, as we do not care to make long explanations to the fellows, we must get out."

He returned the mask to his pocket and led the way from the place. Dodging here and there through the thickets of evergreens, the detectives made their way to the fence and vaulted over. Their team remained where they had left it, and they were soon on their way to the city.

"It strikes me," said Chick, as they rode along, "that this is an odd beginning for an investigation intended to discover the whereabouts of six million dollars. I guess we are up against a gang that would do worse than rob a widow and her child. They certainly shot good and plenty."

"They were sent here to murder us both," replied Nick, "and from now on in this game it is up to us to take no chances."

"Where now?" asked Chick.

"To the Westfield house," was the reply.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAD DOCTOR.

The handsome Westfield house, in the vicinity of Central Park, was dark and silent when the detectives reached it. They did not go directly to the house, but skirted side streets until they came to the north of it. Then they halted.

Nick, who had spent many pleasant hours in the house and knew its interior perfectly, decided to enter by way of a little passage opening from a side street. There were no street lights there, and the detective believed that, by the exercise of extreme caution, they might gain entrance without attracting attention.

"I have an idea that they will be waiting for us tonight," said Chick, "and it may be well to postpone the visit."

"That would never do," replied Nick. "They are now thoroughly alarmed, and whatever is done must be done at once."

"Do you think the men we met at the cemetery will report here?" asked Chick, as they approached the side entrance.

"There is not a doubt of it," was the reply.

"Then there may be warm work on the inside?"

"There is certain to be."

The lock of the little side door readily gave way before Nick's picklock, and the detectives were soon in a little hallway which led to the kitchen.

Before taking a step they both listened. There were no sounds in the house. The air was close and damp, showing that the hallway had not been used of late.

"Now," whispered Nick, "we must get in some place from which we can watch that little room mentioned by Nellie this afternoon. This house is an old-fashioned one, with many little passages, and this room I speak of is at the end of one of these. The kitchen comes first when we open this door, then there is the butler's pantry, then a dining-room which opens on the side street, then there is a little hall. The room which Miller occupied opens from this hall, and is next to a large room used as a family sitting-room. On the other side of the hall are the parlor and the library, with another hall between them. We must in some way get into the library without being seen. There may be some one watching there."

Nick opened the door leading to the kitchen and found the room dark and still.

The butler's pantry was also unoccupied and was in darkness except for a ray of light under the door.

"That may come from the street lamp," suggested Chick, as the detective halted.

"It is too bright for that," was the reply. "There is some one at the front of the house."

"And that is just where we want to do our work," said Chick. "You said you wanted to make an examination of water here. Is the water in the library?"

"Yes," replied Nick, "if it is in the house."

"Poison?"

"That remains to be seen. A glass of water sat by the side of Edwin Westfield when he dropped dead in that room across the hall. That glass of water was disposed of by Miller, or the doctors he summoned, before the attention of the coroner was called to it, or to the fact of its having been there. It is well worth looking up."

"But the water is not there now."

"I have every reason to believe that the bottle from which it was taken is in the library."

"Westfield helped himself to water from this bottle?"

"So I understand."

"And died within a short time?"

"Exactly."

"With no one within reach between drinking and the time of death, and quite well when he entered the library?"

"You have stated it correctly."

"Then it is up to us to find that bottle."

"And another point is," said Nick, "that this strange and unexplained death occurred after the making of a will which no man in his right mind would have made."

"Oh, it points to murder, all right," said Chick, "but we have a fight to make before we land the criminals."

"Don't form theories," replied Nick. "It doesn't pay in cases of this sort. Now, I presume that you have Miller all tried and convicted?"

"It seems clear enough to me that he killed Westfield."

"Perhaps he did, but it is not for us to say that now. What we want is proof."

This conversation had taken place while the detectives were waiting for possible developments. Their experience at the cemetery, when Nick had escaped death by quick thought and good luck, had warned them that the men they were fighting were no ordinary criminals.

The light under the dining-room door remained steady, showing no evidence of people moving about on the other

side and thus cutting it off temporarily. Nick opened the door cautiously and looked inside the room. The door leading to the hall was open, and the place was fairly well lighted, but silent as the grave.

Motioning to Chick to follow and to be ready with his gun, Nick crept to the door and looked out. In front of where he stood was the main vestibule of the house, with a great staircase ascending to the upper floors. All was dark in that direction save for a faint shimmer of light which came from the side hall.

To the right was the door of the room where the lights and noise were. Beyond that was the family sitting-room. Across the center hall, opposite the large sitting-room and the apartment which had been Mrs. Westfield's sewing-room, were the parlors and the library, the latter being at the corner of the building.

In order to reach the library, therefore, it would be necessary for the detectives to pass the open door of the room where the talk was going on. This was risky, to say the least, and it was decided to await developments before taking the desperate chance. Nick and Chick passed out of the dining-room, however, and moved toward the dark corner by the great staircase.

Then occurred a trifling thing which changed the whole plan of work on the case.

In moving through the semidarkness, Chick brushed heavily against a chair and set it to rattling on its feet. In a second he had steadied it with his hand, but the noise had been too distinct, too pronounced in that silent, echoing place, to be disregarded.

At once the sound of footsteps were heard in the lighted room.

"Who is there?" some one called.

Three faces were now observable in the doorway, outlined against the bright light within the room. Nick recognized them as the faces of Miller, Porter, and noted desperate character known to the detective as Bloody Bill, who had served time for many offenses, and was even now wanted by the officers on charge of murder. There was no doubt in Nick's mind that this fellow had led the gang at the cemetery, and that he was there to report.

"Just the wind," said Porter, as the three listened.

"There is no wind in here to-night," said Miller, "but all seems to be quiet now."

"Aw, it's t'at nutty doctor up-stairs," said Bill. "He's

always nosin' around in t'e dark. W'y don't youse-cut him out?"

"This reveals a new character," whispered Chick; "the nutty doctor."

It was not a new character to Nick. He recalled in an instant Nellie Westfield's description of one of the physicians who had been summoned by Miller on the night of the death of her father. He recalled the quarrels in the room into which he was now looking and began to see light ahead.

Presently the three men withdrew from the doorway, and then the detectives moved up the staircase, Nick leading and Chick wholly mystified.

There were no signs of life or light on the second floor. Mounting to the third floor they were greeted by an odd odor of chemicals and the air seemed close and stifling. In one of the rear rooms, which was so situated that all the light in the daytime came from a skylight, there was a steady monotonous buzzing sound, like that made by grinding or boring machinery in swift motion.

"There are plenty of surprises in this case," observed Chick. "We have attempted to rob a grave, and now we seem to be bucking a machine shop in a swell residence."

"You heard what Bill said about a mad doctor?" asked Nick.

"Sure."

"Well, he's in there. I could give you a description of him right now."

"Where did you ever see him?"

"Never," and Nick recalled the description given by Nellie of one of the doctors. Chick listened with a notion gaining ground in his brain that he had seen the man somewhere.

"What is he doing here?" asked Nick. "That is the important question now."

"We seems to have the criminals bunched, anyway," said Chick. "There are three precious rogues downstairs, if not more, and one up here. But it strikes me that we would better be getting down to the library."

"The thing to do now," replied Nick, "is to get a look into that room."

Chick tried the door of the apartment next to that from which the sound proceeded, and found it to be unlocked. In a moment the detectives were inside, with the hall door closed.

There was a door connecting with the other room, and

it stood an inch ajar. The odor of chemicals here was almost overpowering. Nick moved silently to the slight opening and looked through.

A tall, attenuated man, answering to the description of the doctor given by Nellie Westfield, stood with his back to the door, bending over a bench upon which an electric motor was whirling, supplying power to a revolving disk upon which the man appeared to be grinding something. Masks of all sizes and descriptions hung about the walls of the room, some finished and others in a rough state.

Nick stepped back and motioned to Chick to look through.

"It is not difficult to guess where the Westfield death mask came from," said Nick, as the assistant turned away from the crack in the door.

"The tangled clues seem to be unwinding all right," said Chick. "We may look for still another one here."

"To what do you refer?"

"To the poison."

"We have no proof yet that poison was used."

"Well, Westfield never died a natural death."

"Not after making such a will as that," added Nick.

"What next?" asked Chick.

"That is a puzzler."

"Why not surround the house and arrest the whole bunch?"

"That would spoil everything."

Chick remained silent.

"I am wondering," said Nick, in a moment, "whether the man in there would be missed if we should take him prisoner."

"Probably not."

"I think," said Nick, in a moment, "that we shall have to risk it."

"He might confess everything, once under lock and key with his life in danger," urged Chick, who was anxious for lively work.

"The question is, How much does he know?" mused Nick.

"We can learn that only by trying," replied Chick.

It was seldom indeed that Nick Carter ever hesitated as to the course to pursue, but this case was a puzzler. He had been employed on it only a few hours, and had twice come upon the terrifying and the unexpected. He had only his suspicions to influence him, and it was unusual for him to act on such slight grounds.

"Well," he said presently, "we may as well take a

chance with our friend. It will at least give us a chance to search his room and probably the entire floor."

But there was another surprise in store for the detectives. Instead of taking the person called the mad doctor prisoner, there was destined to be a capture of quite another character made there that night, and one not quite so agreeable to the detectives who were doing the planning.

"Be ready when I spring upon him," said Nick. "He must not be permitted to make noise enough to arouse the people below."

"All right."

But just as Nick was about to throw open the door of the room and dash in upon the inmate, a faint click came from the door opening into the hall.

Chick hastened to investigate and found the door locked securely. It was, indeed, not only locked. A sheet of metal, sliding in grooves in the casing, slipped down before Chick's eyes and shut out the sight of the wooden door.

At the same moment an electric globe high up in the ceiling of the room burst out into flame, making the place as light as day.

Chick turned in wonder to his superior and saw that a sheet of metal also hid the door opening into the room where they had seen the doctor working over his masks.

"This looks like a trap," said Chick.

"We are up against a tough proposition," said Nick.

Then the unmistakable odor of escaping gas came to their nostrils.

CHAPTER V.

IN DESPERATE STRAITS.

The reason for the presence of the gas was obvious.

The mad doctor's purpose was to render the detectives unconscious and thus place them at his mercy without a struggle.

The detectives wondered that such a room should exist in a house in the fashionable part of New York City, then they considered that the whole floor was probably used as a field for experiments by the mad doctor, and that many materials were used which would permeate wood and so make the whole house untenable for all save those familiar with the processes going on.

Therefore the sliding metal panels were placed to fill a scientific need. Now, however, they seemed to be about to assist at murder for with the doors clear it would

have been comparatively easy for the imprisoned men to cut their way out.

Chick eyed his superior with a question in his eyes which he for the moment had not the courage to ask.

Nick was thinking fast.

In all his venturesome life he had never been in a tighter box.

Even if it were possible to escape from the sealed room, it would be almost impossible to get out of the house.

Their presence there was now known, and they might be shot down by the men on the first floor.

It was clear that they must get away, if they ever did so, without making any great disturbance.

In many cases one of the detectives had been in deadly peril of his life, but there was usually the other to plan for his release. On this occasion they were both in the clutches of a remorseless foe.

"We can't stand this gas very long," said Nick presently, in a whisper. "When the time comes that you are beginning to feel dizzy, drop to the floor and lie on your face. Then get out your big knife and work a hole through the floor. Be thankful that is of honest wood. Enough air will come through the opening to sustain life for a long time. But you must give every appearance of being completely overcome."

"And then?" asked Chick.

"We can only await developments."

In a moment a panel over the door leading to the inner room shot aside, revealing a pane of glass.

On the other side of this appeared the triumphant, vindictive face of the mad doctor. He grinned like a fiend when he saw the detectives.

"Ha! ha!" he said, the words coming faintly through the glass panel, "you thought to get my secrets! You did not know there is a mirror on the desk where I work. I saw you when you stuck your inquisitive nose through the crack of the door. Ha!"

The detectives remained silent.

"I have need of both of you," continued the mad doctor, "in the interest of science. It has been long since I had two such subjects to work upon. The ones I get from the cemeteries are mostly withered and shrunken. Ha!"

Nick answered only with his eyes.

"I can make your body live for a million years," continued the fiend at the glass panel. "I can make it abide

on the earth forever. I shall make your flesh indestructible and stand you up against the wall, where I can look at you every day. Ha!"

"Clearly mad," whispered Nick. "There is little use in talking with him."

"I have a great mind to take a shot at him," said Chick.

"That would rob us of our last chance for life," said Nick. "Even if you succeeded in killing him and we were able to escape from this hole, the men on the first floor would be about our ears. We must wait."

"I'm getting about enough of this gas," said Chick, in a moment.

"Then drop to the floor and get busy with your knife."

Chick did as directed, and in a moment Nick followed his example.

The flooring was of soft wood, and it was not difficult to cut through it. The air which came through the openings was not of the purest, but it was not loaded with poison, and the current was strong.

"Are you all right?" asked Nick.

"I am good for half a day," was the reply, as Chick groaned in semblance of passing consciousness.

The critical time was now come.

Would the mad doctor go about his work and leave the detectives lying there in supposed unconsciousness for hours, or would he hasten to take possession of them as soon as he believed life to be extinct?

If he pursued the former course, there would be little hope of escape. In fact, the only hope was in the plan suggested by Chick. As a last desperate expedient they must endeavor to in some way break through the wall, even under the fire of the maniac who had outwitted them so deftly.

Ten minutes passed, although to the waiting men the space of time seemed like an eternity. The gas was taking hold of their senses, when a movement was heard at the ceiling, and the awful pressure seemed lifted from their heads.

They knew that an opening had been made, and that the gas was escaping from the room. Strength came back with this new hope of life.

In a few minutes more the door of the inner room was opened, and they heard soft footsteps advancing toward the spot where they lay.

"Ha!" chuckled the maniac. "My beautiful subjects are ready to my hand. Fine specimens they will make. Ha!"

The atmosphere of the room was still heavy with gas, and the detectives wondered how the creature managed to breathe and talk in it. They were having about all they could do to live with a current of air from below pouring into their nostrils.

At last the mad doctor bent down and took Nick by the shoulders, as if to turn him over. The time for action had come.

In an instant Nick had the doctor's arms in his grasp, then Chick was on his back, and in a second the maniac lay helpless and bound on the floor. His eyes rolled in his head. His tongue protruded from his mouth. Foam gathered on his lips, which were cut and bleeding.

"You had it planned out all right," said Chick, "but you did not know whom you were going up against. What next?" he added, turning to Nick.

"I am working in the dark," was the reply. "We are having plenty of adventures, but we do not seem to be making progress in the Westfield case."

"This is a good capture," suggested Chick.

"The man is a maniac," replied Nick, "and is in no-wise responsible for what he says or does."

"He has a queer mania," said Chick. "Do you remember the very cheerful words he flung at us through the glass panel?"

"Certainly his hobby is the preservation of the bodies of the dead."

"Then we may find some specimens of his workmanship in his rooms," suggested the assistant. "Gruesome sort of business, eh?"

"And just the sort of a man for Miller's use," said Nick.

Chick stared at his superior in wonder.

"I see what you are getting at," he said. "It is a wonder I never thought of that. There are the death-masks, you know. Let us see what we can find in his room."

During this conversation the captured maniac had been listening intently to every word uttered by the detectives. When Chick spoke of entering his room he struggled with his bonds and made a desperate effort to speak.

"Look here," said Nick, standing over him with a revolver in his hand. "You want to give us some information, and can't because of the gag. Well, I'm going to remove it, and if you try to raise a row with your mouth I'm going to knock you on the head with this gun. Understand?"

The fellow nodded.

"I don't believe he is quite so mad as he pretends to be," said Chick.

Nick removed the gag and assisted the doctor to a sitting-position.

"Now speak," he said.

"You'll be killed if you go in there," said the maniac, whose cunning was now observable in his seemingly rational speech: "The place is lined with secret electrical wires, and you'll get up against them and be killed."

"You were not so careful of our safety a few moments ago," said Nick. "I know something about electricity, and I think I'll risk it."

The room was indeed a perfect maze of electrical wires and appliances, and one less versed in the mysterious science might have come to a sudden death, but the detective made his investigations unharmed.

At the rear of the workshop they came upon a little room evidently used by the mad doctor as a sleeping-chamber, and, after replacing the gag, they tossed him on the bed and closed the door.

"There is little to see here, except the masks," said Chick, after a search of the workshop. "We may as well turn our attention to the fellows down-stairs."

In the meantime, Nick was busy over various pans of liquid in which substances, seemingly for dissolution, had been placed. He found round pellets in some of the pans and square shapes in others. Some were nearly dissolved, while others were in full form.

"What is it?" asked Chick.

"It looks to me like a series of experiments with acid," was the reply. "Can you determine what this substance is?"

"Looks like the material of which capsules are made," was the reply. "Now, what under the canopy could he want of such knowledge?"

Nick placed some of the material in his pocket and set the pans away in a place of safety. As he did so, he heard footsteps in the hall outside.

"Open up here!" shouted a voice which the detectives recognized as that of Miller.

Nick opened the bedroom door and removed the gag.

"Tell that man to go away," he commanded, "or it will be the worse for you."

Abject from terror and fearful that his treasures might be exposed to still other eyes, the mad doctor called out as requested.

The clamor at the door continued for a moment and then all was still.

"Ha! He minds me!" hissed the maniac. "I hold a secret of his. Ha! He listens to me."

As Nick stepped into the sleeping-room for the second time his eye fell upon a collection of phials on a shelf which he had not before observed. An examination showed that all contained deadly poison.

Chick did not see the smile of satisfaction which came to the face of his superior, but he knew from his change of manner that some decision had been reached.

"Go up into the garret," Nick said, "and see if you can find some place in which to hide this fellow. We shall want these rooms to ourselves."

Chick complied, and soon returned with the information that at the very top of the house there was just the place for the purpose, and, kicking and fighting every inch of the way, the maniac was removed.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK TAKES A CHANCE.

"What do you know about hypnotism?" asked Nick, as the two detectives returned to the workshop.

"I know a little about it," was the reply. "What has hypnotism to do with the Westfield case?"

"Did you notice the mad doctor's eyes?"

"Certainly. They are enough to frighten the life out of a man."

"Well, I believe he is under hypnotic influence," said Nick.

"Whose?"

"That is for us to find out. The man certainly is not insane in the ordinary sense of the term."

"Keeping him locked up there won't help him any."

"Of course not, but he must stay there for a time while I impersonate the mad doctor."

"Impossible."

Chick was clearly dismayed at the suggestion.

"Nothing is impossible," was the reply.

"But where is the necessity of such a perilous undertaking?"

"The secret of the death of Edwin Westfield and the secret of the disappearance of his great fortune are locked up in this house," replied Nick. "This is not a case for a score of men to work on. It is not a case that can be won by violence. Cunning and courage alone remain. We must take chances. By to-morrow Miller

will have the proof we have secured to-night scattered to the four winds of heaven, and maybe out of the country. The work must be done to-night. Your part is to watch Miller and see that he does not get away. If he does leave the house you must follow him."

"And leave you here to play this dangerous rôle alone?"

"With Miller out of the house there will be little danger."

"He may not attempt to leave," said Chick. "If he does I can just knock him on the head."

"That would destroy all hope of recovering the money. Although we have been led into this by-path in this case, the recovery of the money is the real issue. We must use Miller in order to accomplish our ends."

"Do you think the money, this immense fortune stolen from the widow and daughter of Edwin Westfield, is actually in this house?"

"It may be."

"Then it is for us to discover it."

Nick now began the work of making up for the dangerous rôle he was to play—a rôle which he was determined should place him face to face with Miller and Porter, if indeed the latter remained in the house until all was ready.

He found plenty of clothing belonging to the mad doctor in a closet just off his sleeping-room and chose the shabbiest suit there.

"It will be difficult to make up my face to match that of the maniac," said Nick, "and so I must pretend to be at the dirtiest work here in order that I may wear a protecting coat of grime. How is the color of the hair?"

"Yours is too light."

"Then it must be doctored up with this black stuff," said Nick "and it will take about a week to get rid of it. However, there is no other way."

The two men worked long and faithfully over Nick's disguise and at last it was pronounced well-nigh perfect. "I wonder how much liberty this mad doctor has in the house?" mused Nick. "If I go rambling over the lower floor will they consider it unusual?"

"You may get a good knock on the head in learning about that," said Chick. "The scheme does not look good to me, anyway."

Nick laughed at the fears of his assistant and started to leave the room.

"You haven't tried your voice yet," suggested Chick.

The words and tone which followed caused the assistant to start back in alarm. For an instant, notwithstanding all that had gone before, he actually believed that the mad doctor had in some way made his escape and had reached the hallway outside.

"Remain here," said Nick, in his natural voice, "until I take a look around the house. Keep the doors shut and do not open them except at my signal."

Then Nick started off on his perilous mission.

The detective passed softly down the stairs to the second floor. The halls and rooms were dark, as before, and he did not linger there.

At the head of the great staircase he paused and listened. The sound of voices came from the Miller room, but the door was now closed, leaving the hall in darkness.

Nick passed on down and approached the closed door. He could not hear all that was being said on the inside, but he distinguished the voice of the tough raised in protest.

"I ain't to blame, if t'e fellers did run away," he was saying, "an' I wants me money."

The tough spoke louder than the others and Nick could not hear the reply.

"I'll get t'e razzle-dazzle w'en I goes back to t'e bunch short of coin," said the heavy voice again, "an' I don't stan' fer it—see?"

"When a man makes a bargain with fellows like Bill," Nick mused, "he is a fool to quarrel with them."

"Oh, I tumbles," continued the voice of the rowdy. "I knows w'at youse is up to. It's a get-away fer youse, an' me to t'e bad fer helpin' youse. I say t'e money is in t'e house. Youse got millions here. Don't I know t'at youse gettin' ready to jump?"

Satisfied that he could learn nothing from a one-sided conversation of this sort, and anxious to get into action, Nick moved a heavy chair about and emitted a sharp exclamation.

Instantly the hall was flooded with light from the open door, and Miller stood looking out into the hall. Porter stood close to him, and Bill was looking over their shoulders.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Miller, addressing the counterfeit doctor. "I have warned you repeatedly to keep off this floor. What do you want?"

For a moment Nick did not look up, but stood bent

over, rubbing his shins as if injured by contact with a chair.

When he did look up the detective mumbled feebly:

"I can't find my bottles."

"You are getting worse every day," said Miller angrily. "I'll turn you out of the house if you don't behave. What have you lost now?"

"My bottles."

"Well, hunt about and find them, and get out, back to your den."

It was evident that Miller suspected nothing.

Nick moved away toward the library door.

"Here," called Miller, "you are not to go in there."

"Ha!" cried Nick, imitating the tone of the mad doctor perfectly, "I know what was done in there, but I'm not afraid to go in. Ha!"

Miller and Porter retreated a step, but the tough remained in the doorway. Nick realized in an instant that in some way he had made a mistake.

As the detective moved along toward the library door, he saw the tough take Miller by the arm and whisper in his ear.

"All right," said Miller, "go ahead and see what you can make of it."

Nick was amazed as well as annoyed. Had the eyes of the tough proved sharper than those of the attorneys? Was he about to be attacked?

He passed on into the library, however, and closed the door, which was instantly opened by the tough, who remained standing in the doorway.

"Git w'at youse want an' git out," he said.

Nick's mission to the first floor at that time was twofold. First, he desired to secure possession of the bottle of water before referred to if it was still there; second, he wanted information regarding the movements of Miller and Porter.

He had heard Miller told to his face by one of his underlings that he was about to leave the country, but he had no means of knowing whether the accusation had been denied. However, Nick had no doubt of the fact.

Now for the bottle of water. The whole case might hinge on that.

He approached the secret closet where it was kept and touched the spring which held the door. The bottle was not there!

"Say," said the tough, advancing to the detective's

side, "how many more of them hidin'-places is there in this house?"

"Ha!" cried Nick. "Many! Many! Ha!"

"Then go on an' dig up some more."

It was plain that the tough believed that Miller had the stolen fortune hidden in the house, and was willing to accept the assistance of the mad doctor in securing a share of it.

"Ha!" said Nick, in reply to the tough. "They are full of bottles. Ha!"

"That one don't seem to be burstin' wit' bottles," grinned the tough. "Where are the ones that hold the gold?"

This was becoming decidedly interesting for the detective, but the climax had not yet been reached.

"Dig up t'e gold," continued the tough, "an' youse can have a wad of it. Dig up t'e gold, I tell youse, or I'll break yer face. See?"

At that instant Miller appeared in the doorway, his face pale with passion.

"What are you doing in here?" he demanded, glaring at the tough. "You get back to the office. And you," he added, turning to Nick, "get back to your den. I'll teach you both to go snooping in this house."

While the three men stood glaring at each other there came from the rooms above the loud, vibrant, penetrating tones of a battery of electric bells.

"What deviltry is on foot now?" shouted Miller. "What have you been doing up there, you fiend?" he added, seizing Nick by the shoulder.

Nick broke away and made a dash for the stairs. He had a notion that something was wrong with Chick. Miller and the tough followed on behind as the detective sprang up three steps at a time.

The jangling of the bells grew in volume as they proceeded, and now and then a harsh and defiant laugh came from the darkness above.

When they reached the second floor the whole place was flooded with electric light and the confusion of bells was doubled.

It was now plain to Nick that in some manner the mad doctor had made his escape, and had, in revenge for his ill treatment, set out to alarm the house. For all he knew, Chick might have been murdered.

Doing his best to keep as far in advance as possible, Nick sped up the stairs leading to the third floor. The door to the workshop was open, and he bounded in and

closed it with a slam. Chick was nowhere to be seen. In a moment Miller and the tough set up a pounding on the door, but Nick paid no attention to this.

He advanced into the sleeping-room where the mad doctor had been left and found the bed empty. An open door in the wall, however, revealed the source of flight. Dashing into the narrow entrance, Nick closed the door behind him. He found himself on a flight of stairs which in the old days had led from the kitchen to the storeroom, but which had not been used for many years, the storeroom being difficult of access by them. At the kitchen landing another flight led to the basement of the house.

It was clear that the mad doctor had made use of this passage in his journeys about the place, for electric bulbs were strung along the walls, and all were now blazing with light. As Nick descended he could hear Miller and the tough pounding at the door of the workroom, which had once been the storeroom, but he paid no attention to the racket they were making. His thought at that moment was for the safety of his assistant.

At last Nick came to the far end of the basement, which was also flooded with electric light. Here a stone wall shut off a room from the big underground apartment. During the life of Edwin Westfield this had been the wine-cellar. Nick tried the door to this cellar and found it locked.

Thus far he had seen nothing of the mad doctor or his assistant, but now there came a maniacal laugh from the other end of the basement and the lights were extinguished, leaving the place in utter darkness. There now came a rush of footsteps on the stairs leading from the kitchen, followed by a struggle and exclamations of pain and anger.

It was plain that the mad doctor had fallen into the hands of Miller and the tough. Nick began an investigation with a view of finding his way out of the place, the trick he had practised upon Miller would now be recovered. The captured man would be dressed differently from the counterfeit doctor they had seen on the lower floor! He gave the well-known signal summoning Chick, but there was no reply to his call.

As he listened for a moment he heard the voice of the doctor raised in entreaty and explanation. Now Miller and his gang knew that strangers were in the house! He crept back to a corner by the wine-cellar and waited.

Presently he heard a faint pounding on the door of

the wine-cellar. Taking out his dark lantern and shading the light from the back of the cellar, he examined the fastening of the door. It was a spring-lock, and yielded readily to his picklock. He pushed the door open and entered, closing it quickly behind him. As he did so a faint click came from the other side.

"There," said the voice of Chick, "you have cut the same caper that I did."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE WINE-CELLAR.

"How did you get in here?" asked Nick, turning on the rays of his lantern in full.

"Just as you did."

"How did that mad man get away?"

"That is what I'd like to know. The first I knew there came that ringing of bells, the glare of lights, and a laugh. I hastened to the sleeping-room and our bird had gotten away. I followed him just as you followed me, and that is the story. Now, how are we to get out of here?"

"Same way we got in."

"I'm afraid not."

"But why not?"

"Because that lock can be worked only from the outside."

Nick pondered a moment.

"We can cut our way out, all right," he said, "but that is not the difficulty. Miller and his gang are on the watch for us."

"I see."

"I wonder what will happen next?" asked Nick. "We have managed to make rather a lively night of it so far."

"They'll burn the house down before they will let us get away," said Chick.

"I presume so, but there is always a way."

"You'll have to show me," said Chick.

"Well," replied Nick, "there is another room opening from this cellar. I used to know how to find it, for the best wine was always kept there. You see, Mr. Westfield was rather choice of his wine, and the servants had a way of stealing it, so he had a room pushed out under the sidewalk."

"Can we get out from there?"

"Only by digging out the stones."

"Well, we can do that in time."

"But while we are doing that Miller will be getting out of the country."

"It can't be helped. See if you can find the room."

"It is not a very large room," said Nick, "and the door is concealed in the wall, but it must be on that side, unless I am completely turned around."

"Yes," replied Chick, "the street must be there."

Nick lifted his hand for silence and covered his light.

Dull blows came faintly to the ears of the waiting men. Their pursuers were working at the heavy door with crowbars, or some such instrument.

"They mean to have us out," said Nick.

"Find the inner room," urged Chick.

Both men glanced over the wall where the door must be. There was nothing of the kind in sight.

"Stay," said Nick, "there is some other way to locate it. I used to know."

In a moment he began counting from left to right and from bottom to top.

Then he stepped forward and pressed heavily on a large stone almost in the center of the wall. The great stone rolled back on hinges, revealing an opening.

"Observe," said Nick, with a smile, "how the wealthy protect their precious wine from thieving servants."

"Can the door be closed and opened from the other side?"

"Certainly."

"Well, let me get in first and close it, and you remain out here so as to make sure that we will not get locked in."

The blows on the door now came with redoubled force.

"Make haste," said Nick, and Chick disappeared in the opening.

In a moment Nick heard a cry of alarm from his assistant, and his head appeared in the narrow opening.

"What is up?" asked Nick.

Chick's face was pallid and his voice trembled.

"Must we get in here?" he asked.

"Unless we want to be murdered."

"Then come on; I can't bear to be in here alone."

"Are there ghosts in there?" asked the detective, annoyed at the fright of his usually daring assistant.

"Worse," said Chick.

But the time for action had come.

The point of a bar of iron was showing through the broken door.

In another moment the detectives might have been seen by those on the outside.

"I don't like this idea of running away," said Nick,

"but that seems to be the correct thing to do, in the interest of the widow and daughter of Edwin Westfield, at this time. Still, I would like to meet those fellows."

Chick seized his chief by the arm and drew him through the opening.

"You are too full of fight," he said, closing the door. "Look about you and then say if coolness and prudence are not needed now."

Nick uncovered his lantern and looked around.

A low cry came from his lips and the lantern slipped from his hand.

"Great Caesar!" he cried. "Who could have suspected anything like this? It is enough to make a man lose faith in his kind."

Chick lifted the lantern and relighted it.

"Yes," said Nick, "keep them both going. I cannot think of what this place must be like in the darkness."

In a moment they heard their pursuers entering the wine-cellar.

"I wonder if that madman will show them this place?" asked Chick.

"It is hardly probable," was the reply. "If he does there will be a fight."

The detectives listened long in suspense.

They could hear voices raised in anger, and occasionally the wild laugh of the mad doctor.

In time the voices grew louder, and then there came a scuffle, followed by heavy blows and groans.

"Murder is being done out there," cried Nick. "Hold your light here so I can see to open the door."

Chick complied, but Nick could not find the spring which moved the great stone.

"To sit here and know what is going on out there maddens me," cried Nick.

"Try again," urged Chick. "The spring must be there somewhere."

Nick again bent to the task of finding the way to the door, but did not succeed. By this time, however, the sounds on the other side had died out, and there was a moment's silence.

Then came the sound of a shovel or spade at work in the soft soil of the cellar bottom.

"They are making a grave!" gasped Chick.

Nick wiped great drops of perspiration from his face.

"It is horrible!" he cried.

Soon even these sounds died away and silence reigned in the basement.

"Who was killed?"

It was Chick who asked the question.

Nick shook his head.

"Probably the madman."

"Why the madman?"

"That is the puzzle," replied Chick.

"It may have been Miller," said Nick.

"Impossible!"

"But he quarreled with the bully who led the gang at the cemetery to-night."

"He was a fool to do that."

"Certainly, but he did."

"We shall soon know," said Chick, "and in the meantime we may as well be finding our way out of this place."

"Yes, we must take action before the murderers get away."

Again Nick worked at the stone which so jealously guarded the entrance to the private wine-vault.

"I guess we shall have to give it up and dig our way out," he finally said.

Another search, however, revealed the spring, and the door was cautiously opened.

There were no signs of life outside. The entire basement was wrapped in utter darkness.

Nick turned the rays of his lantern on a mound of earth which showed in one corner.

"There is the grave," he said.

Chick stepped forward and began to dig with his hands, but Nick stopped him with a gesture.

"Don't do that," he said. "It looks too ghoulish."

After a time the spade which had been used by the murderer was discovered, and the grave was soon laid open.

The mangled face of the mad doctor looked out.

"I thought it couldn't be Miller who was killed," said Chick. "I think Miller is the murderer. I wonder why he was killed?"

"I have an idea," replied Nick, "but this is no time for theories. We must know whether Miller has left the house."

The detectives advanced toward the stair leading to the kitchen.

As they did so the soft rustle of a woman's garments came to their ears.

Both paused in amazement.

What woman could be in that house at that time?

The sound approached the kitchen landing and stopped. Then there came a sharp cry in a girl's voice and all was still again.

Both men bounded forward.

"That was the voice of Nellie Westfield," cried Nick. "How came she here at this awful time?"

When the detectives reached the landing they found the door locked and barred on the other side.

They sprang against it and succeeded in forcing their way through the broken panels.

The kitchen was dark, and the door to the butler's pantry was fastened. When this was broken down, as the other had been, there was the dining-room door to deal with.

As they fell upon this new barrier a pistol-shot came from the other side and a leaden pellet came whistling about Chick's ear.

Chick drew back, but Nick continued his assault on the door until it gave way, regardless of the bullets which sang about his head.

When the door fell both detectives dropped to their hands and knees and crept into the dark hall. In the distance they heard fleeing footsteps and a girl's cry for help.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOST TREASURE.

In a moment a heavy door clanged to in the upper hall and then all was still.

"I hope," said Nick, "that the shooting and the smashing of doors did not attract the attention of the police. I want to handle Miller myself."

"How did Nellie Westfield come to be here at this hour?" asked Chick.

"Miller probably forged my name to a message and sent it to her," was the reply.

"But his motive?"

"That will appear later, but, whatever happens, she must not be permitted to visit the secret wine-vault."

"The first thing to do is to find her," said Chick.

"Yes," replied Nick, "but it is useless to go rushing around a dark house, inviting lead from an ambushed enemy. We must find some better way than that."

Just then the telephone-bell in the room which had been occupied by Miller since the death of Edwin Westfield rang sharply.

"Ah," said Nick, "there may be some information

here. Miller has evidently been talking over the wire to-night, and this may be an answer."

The detective hastened into the room and took down the receiver.

"Is this Miller?" was the question that came over the line.

"Yes" replied Nick, imitating the voice of the rascally attorney.

"Is the girl there?"

"You mean Nellie?"

"Of course."

"She is here."

"What does she say about a possible hiding-place?"

"She won't say anything."

"Then you must get it out of the doctor."

"He had an attack an hour ago, and is not in the house."

"That is bad."

"Can't you suggest something?" asked Nick.

"It is almost too late now to do anything."

"But the money——"

"You should have left it in the bank for another day. The idea of storing it there in the house with that madman prowling about."

"Are you coming over?"

"I can do no good. Get all you can from the girl, and we will have a search made in the morning."

"But the detectives are after me."

"Oh, we can fool them all right."

"You are not very consoling, Archer."

"Good night."

Nick hung up the receiver with a smile on his face.

"What do you make of it?" asked Chick.

"It is as plain as the nose on your face," was the reply.

"Miller sold out his stocks and bonds and brought the money here."

"Well. You had an idea it was in the house."

"Yes, but it seems that the mad doctor stole it."

"Ah! That accounts for a great deal."

"At least it cannot be found."

"What was it he said about Nellie?"

"Just enough to let me know that she was brought here in the hope that she might point out a secret hiding-place where the cash might have been hidden."

"Then Miller knew early in the evening that it had been taken away from his hiding-place?"

"Probably."

"Why didn't he make a row about it, then?"

"My notion is," replied Nick, "that he was afraid to let Porter and the bully know that it had passed from his control. You remember that I told you about his having a quarrel with the bully over the payment of his bill for the cemetery job."

"Well," said Chick, "if Miller can't find the money to-night he will never find it, for he will be in a cell before noon to-morrow."

"It is a sure thing," said Nick, "that Nellie will not help him find it. Rather thoughtful of him, though, to send for her."

"What a fool Miller was to murder the madman. That cut off his last hope of finding the money."

"Perhaps it also cut off our last hope," said Nick, "for the fiend may have sent the money out of the house."

Chick smiled.

"Suppose we quit talking about the money," he said, "and find some way to get the girl away from Miller and to get our hands on him."

Nick looked at his assistant curiously, but said nothing.

"If he has something up his sleeve," he thought, "he will out with it before long."

"If we get Miller," said Nick, in a moment, "it will be easy enough to find the girl. I wonder where he has placed her?"

Just then there came a sharp ring at the front door.

"The police," said Chick.

Nick went to the door and opened it the length of the chain.

By the light of a street lamp he saw four men standing there, all in police uniform.

"What's the trouble here?" one of them asked gruffly.

"Nothing," was the reply.

"Then what is all this shooting about?"

Without a word in reply, Nick closed the door, locked it, and put up the bar.

Chick looked on in amazement.

"What is that for?" he asked.

"They are not policemen," said Nick. "They do not look the part. They are toughs sent here by Archer."

While the two detectives stood at the front door there was a movement in the darkness in the direction of the dining-room door.

Nick heard a rustling there and turned about.

"Look out!" he cried to Chick.

But the call came too late.

Half a dozen muscular men pounced upon the detectives, and after a desperate struggle they were overcome.

The instant the detectives were secured lights flamed up in the house, and Miller was seen standing at the foot of the great staircase. The look on his face combined malice and triumph.

"You are a clever pair," he said to the bound men. "Three times one of you has been outwitted to-night, and the other twice. You ought to be proud of your records."

"You are a genius, Miller," said Nick, "but your time will come. Have you found the money hidden by the madman?"

"I had no money to hide," was the reply. "I am leaving the country a poor man."

"I guess that is right," said Nick. "When you leave this land you will go where there is no use for money. You can't buy drafts on that country from the electric chair."

Miller foamed with rage. He would have assaulted the detectives only his companions restrained him.

"You seem to be working on the theory," he howled, "that I have committed some great crime. Where is your proof?"

"In the wine-vault," replied Nick.

Miller again sprang forward, with an oath on his lips, but again he was held back by those nearest him.

"You are losing your nerve, Miller," said Nick coolly. "When you planned to rob the widow of Edwin Westfield you were quite a different man."

"I have no time to bandy words with you," said Miller. Then he approached Nick and hissed in his ear.

"I shall see that you never escape to tell the secret of the wine-vault. Your own bones shall rot there."

"Don't get excited, Miller," said Nick tauntingly. "You are a clever sort of a chap, and have played your cards well to-night, but you are at the end of the rope. What have you done with Nellie Westfield? Perhaps she can assist you in finding the money hidden by the mad doctor, whom you murdered before you could learn his secret."

"The girl is safe," was the sullen reply, "and ready to show all the secret places in this barn of a house."

"You are getting to be a very fair liar, Miller," said Nick. "Now, go on and make your hunt for the West-

field millions. Perhaps the mad doctor shipped them to Europe for you."

"There is sense in what the man says," observed one of the captors. "We are losing time here. Where shall we begin?"

"Archer sent you, did he?" asked Nick, eying the speaker.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because Archer is anxious for his share of the plunder."

"Come," said Miller, "we may as well get down to business. We must begin at one corner of the house and sound every wall and every inch of flooring for a secret nook. The madman never got the money out of the house."

"Yes, get busy," said Nick scornfully. "You are a brave lot."

Miller approached the detective again.

"When I get rid of these men," he declared, "I'll tie you with chains and burn you to death by inches."

"You seem to be a cheerful sort of a person," said Nick.

The searching-party now scattered over the house, leaving one husky man to guard the two bound detectives. The sentinel was a burly brute, but not ill-natured. He sat himself down on the bottom step of the staircase and lit a cigar.

"Why don't you give a fellow a smoke?" asked Chick.

The fellow took out another cigar, lit it at his own, and passed it over to Chick, who handled the weed awkwardly enough, his hands being tied behind him with a strong cord.

"This is all right," said Chick, throwing himself on his side and rolling toward his chief. "I'll just smoke myself to sleep and forget my troubles."

"You're a nervy cuss," said the sentinel. "I can't smoke lying down. I must walk about a bit."

Suiting action to the words, he arose and paced up and down the hall. He thought he was watching the prisoners closely, but he did not know that it was Nick Carter and Chick who lay there on the floor. Had he possessed that information he would never have left their side for an instant.

And while the sentinel walked about Chick was lying at Nick's back, burning his bonds with his lighted cigar! The sentinel was faithful enough, but he was not up to the tricks and expedients of expert detectives.

CHAPTER IX.

A CRY OF ALARM.

The sentinel continued to walk the floor, going as far away as the door of the dining-room, which was left open. The movements of the searchers could be heard all over the house. They tapped the walls and floors industriously, listening after each blow for a hollow sound which might reveal a cavity in the wall or floor large enough to contain the money.

Presently from somewhere below came an awful scream of terror, followed by a quick rush of feet. The noise seemed to come from the kitchen stairs leading to the basement, and the sentinel darted through the dining-room and opened the door leading into the butler's pantry.

One of the searchers, white-faced and trembling, stood in view when the door swung open. So weak and faint was he from fright that he fell upon his knees in front of the sentinel.

"What is it?" demanded the latter. "Get up, you fool."

"It is murder!" howled the man, holding aloft his hands which were covered with earth soaked in blood.

The sentinel started back.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

"I dug down the wine-cellar," faltered the man, "and dug down where I saw a heap of soft earth. There I came upon——"

The frightened wretch covered his face with his hands and ceased to speak.

"Well, well," cried the sentinel excitedly, "what did you find? The money?"

"A murdered man, with his head cut to pieces. Let me out of this place! I can't breathe here. Let me out, I say, or I shall do some one a mischief."

The man attempted to reach the front door, but the sentinel held him back. While they struggled the detectives were very industriously removing the last of their bonds. Nick's hands released by the burning of the cord which held them, he had made good use of his knife.

"Are we ready for action?" asked Chick.

Before the question could be answered there was a soft rustle of skirts on the stairs and the face of Nellie Westfield looked down from the middle landing.

Seeing Nick lying on the floor, apparently bound, she hastened to his side.

Then there came a rush of people into the hall. The

searchers, hearing the cries of the frightened man, had rushed to the point from which they had been sent out.

"Go back!" whispered Nick to the girl. "Hide somewhere! Quick!"

But the warning came too late, for Miller stood on the middle landing looking down with a leer of triumph on his face.

"And so the ladybird tried to get away," he sneered.

"Open that door," commanded Nellie. "I want to leave this house."

"After making so long a journey in the night to reach it?" asked Miller, with a grin. "No, no, my girl, we have use for you here."

Nellie nestled down by the side of the detective and laid her hand on his shoulder as if for protection.

"Get away from there!" thundered Miller, seizing the girl roughly by the arm and whirling her viciously across the hall.

Nick's fingers ached to get at the throat of the fiend, but he knew that the time for action had not come, so, much against his will, he remained quiet.

The man who had fled from the wine-cellar in terror now came forward, his eyes still showing a fright that was almost paralyzing.

"I want to get out of this place," he said. "I did not come here to assist in the killing and burying of ~~man~~. Let me out."

Miller sprang toward the fellow, rage and suspicion blazing in his eyes.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

The man lifted his stained hands.

"Where there is blood," he said. "If you don't let me out of this house I shall call the police."

Miller's face looked like the face of a fiend. He knew then that the body in the wine-cellar had been discovered. He had known before that the detectives had knowledge of the murder, how gained he could not guess, but that was different, for he was fully determined that the detectives should never leave the house alive. He believed them to be securely bound and at his mercy.

But how was this fellow to be silenced? Already he had, without doubt, told of the gruesome discovery he had made. This would place him—Miller—at the mercy of the unscrupulous men sent by Archer to assist in the search for the money.

"The man is crazy!" shouted Miller. "We must put him away, or he will betray us all. Come, men!"

The quick action of the men gave Miller a ray of hope. He had already figured on removing the body and so giving the lie to the man's words.

"Take him away to a secure place," he said, as the searchers closed about their struggling companion. "We can attend to him later."

The frightened, cursing man was dragged away, and Miller turned to Nellie.

"You go back to your room," he said.

"I command you to open that door," replied the girl. "You shall pay dearly for this night's work, sir."

Miller laughed a low, mirthless laugh, which frightened the girl more than his threats had done.

"You are going to stay right here," he said, "and you are going to help me find the property that madman stole. You were reared in this house. You know every nook and corner in it. There is not a place where the treasure might be hidden that is not perfectly familiar to you."

Nellie remained silent.

"You are not very successful in your wooing," said Nick. "You are not the man you once were, Miller."

It was evident that the detective's taunts enraged the attorney almost beyond the power of endurance, but he made no attack upon him.

"I can settle with you later on," he said.

"If you don't make haste," said Nick, "I shall probably be of old age before you get time to take up my case. It is not pleasant lying here in this shape in the presence of a lady, don't you see?"

"I'll see that you do not die of old age," said Miller significantly.

"Again I ask you," the attorney continued, turning to Nellie, "if you will tell me where the hiding-places are."

"Of course she will not," said Nick.

"You are trying my patience to the limit," said Miller more calmly.

The searchers who had removed their terrorized companion now gathered in the hall again waiting for orders.

"Keep up the search," said Miller, "See, it is getting daylight, and we have no time to lose."

As the last man departed Miller turned to Nellie again.

"One word from you," he said impatiently, "would give us all this trouble."

Nellie remained silent.

"I mean to have it out of you!" thundered the attorney.

He stepped to the girl's side and took her roughly by the shoulder.

"Look here," he said. "Your friends are bound and helpless. If you do not speak I will murder them before your eyes. I will beat their faces out of all semblance to humanity, and you shall stand there and see it done."

"You brute!" cried Nick. "You are frightening the child."

Miller glared at the detective, but did not address him.

"And after I have done that," he continued, speaking to Nellie, "I will spoil that pretty face of yours so that your own mother will look upon you with horror. I aim too near my goal now to be balked by a slip of a girl."

In fact, the attorney seemed almost mad with anxiety and rage. He paced up and down before the girl, threatening and coaxing, until Nick was about ready to spring upon him and close the scene.

Nellie remained firm.

At last the enraged attorney seized her by the hair, scarce knowing what he did.

"I'll show you!" he hissed, "what it is to defy me. I'll show you!"

Just as he would have struck the girl's head against the wall Nick sprang upon him and hurled him to the floor.

Miller tried to fight off the sudden attack, but he was as a child in the hands of the athletic detective.

In a moment he was bound with the ropes which had served to secure the two detectives, and lay foaming with rage.

"You are a clever fellow, Miller, as I have said before," said Nick, "but you are becoming careless in your old age. You see that, for the third time to-night, you have been put to the bad."

"I'll show you when my men come," said Miller.

"By the way," said Nick, turning to his assistant, "telephone to the central police station for a squad of men in plain clothes to come up here and clean these loafers out of the house. And you may as well call a cab, for Nellie must not stay here."

Both orders were promptly obeyed, and, the cab arriving first, Nellie was on her way home before the closing act of the tragedy opened.

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded Miller after a time.

"First," was the reply, "I'm going to take you to a nice, quiet room where we shall not be disturbed, and

then I am going to tell you how you murdered Edwin Westfield."

"It is a lie!" shouted Miller. "I did not murder him. The coroner admitted that he died of heart-disease."

"I'll tell you about that later," said Nick. "Come, Chick, we may as well get him in a safe place. His loafers may drop in any minute, and that will necessitate more shooting."

Miller was lifted bodily and carried to the old family sitting-room, which had already been searched, and was therefore likely to remain undisturbed for the remainder of the night, or morning, rather, for daylight was now in the streets.

Before long the policemen arrived and the searchers were driven away. There was no charge to be placed against them, and so they were not arrested. Only the man who had discovered the dead body of the mad doctor in the wine-cellar was kept in the house, and he was so overcome by fright that he hardly knew what was going on.

After the departure of the officers, Miller was, much against his will, taken to the wine-cellar. He turned ghastly pale when he saw the open grave in the corner.

"I did not strike the blow," he cried. "It was Billy who struck him down."

"We did not come here to talk of the murder of the mad doctor," said Nick, "but of the cowardly murder of Edwin Westfield."

"Edwin Westfield was not murdered!" cried Miller. "And, even if he was, you have no proof. You are springing a bluff on me."

"Wait a minute," said Nick, "and you shall see."

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY TOLD.

"First," began Nick, standing by the side of the quaking attorney in the wine-cellar, which had formed so prominent a setting for that night's tragedy, "you conspired to gain the confidence of Edwin Westfield. By slow degrees you wormed your way into his confidence, little worthy of it as you were. You lured him into business schemes of which you were always the beneficiary.

"At last, finding that his money was not coming your way fast enough, you planned to forge a will which would give you absolute control of the estate and murder him."

"It is all a lie," shouted the attorney.

"By what means you only know, you secured the signing of such a will. I half believe that you had a hypnotic influence over the unfortunate man. The pretext for the making of this monstrous will was that in case of his sudden death all your enterprises would go to smash and the estate come to ruin. At any rate, such a will was made, for there is no proof that the one probated is a forgery."

"It was all open and aboveboard!" cried Miller.

"Then, the will being made, you plotted for the murder of your benefactor in order that you might secure the fortune. Let me tell you how you killed him."

"He died of heart-disease at his library table, two hours and more after leaving me in perfect health," said the attorney. "Make murder of that if you can."

"That is what I am prepared to do," replied Nick, and even Chick bent forward with a look of intense interest on his face. Nick had not confided to him the manner of the death of Edwin Westfield.

"In the course of business you had formed the acquaintance of a half-crazy doctor, known as Henry Malletto."

Miller started violently at the mention of the name of the mad doctor.

"This doctor had a hobby, which was the preservation of the human body after death. He also had a hobby regarding poisons. It was his theory that, under proper conditions, a person might be fed poison and die hours after, far away from the person who administered the dose."

"It is all a clever lie!" exclaimed Miller. "You are trying to frighten me. What do I know about the mad doctor, except that he came to me for aid in making perfectly legitimate experiments?"

"He lies there!"

Nick pointed to the half-open grave as he spoke.

The attorney shivered with fear.

"You persuaded this mad doctor to make you poison pellets which would not dissolve in the stomach for two hours after taking. The doctor consented, and in return you made him a promise, to which I will refer later."

"All a lie!" hissed Miller, upon whose face a purple tinge was growing.

"You induced Edwin Westfield to take one of the deadly pellets one night, and you waited outside his door

for the murder to be consummated in order that you might be on the spot to take charge of his estate, and in order that you might have creatures of your own in the doctors and lawyers who would naturally be called."

"You are a very good liar," was all Miller could say.

"But you were fearful that the poison would not be quick enough, so you planned to have the capsule which should contain the poison made so that it would instantly dissolve in water in which a certain acid had been placed. You knew of Westfield's habit of taking a glass of water from a bottle in his room just before retiring, and you planned that he would do so on this night. You planned wisely, and at midnight Edwin Westfield was a dead man."

"A likely story," cried Miller. "Where is your proof for all this? I presume you know that it is a serious offense in this State to accuse one of crime."

"You shall have the proof directly," replied Nick. "The story is nearly finished."

"That is encouraging," said Miller.

"You entered the Westfield house that night with creatures of your own about you. You caused an accomplice of your own to be appointed attorney for the widow, and between the two of you the estate was angled up so that it became yours. Then you turned the widow and daughter into the street."

"That is false, for they left me."

"There is where you made a mistake. Had you cared for them decently you might have kept a large share of the fortune and never been molested. Men always make mistakes when they are cruel to women and children."

"Quite a preacher," sneered Miller. "But I am waiting for your proof."

"Now I come to your contract with the mad doctor," continued the detective. "You promised him that in return for his share in the murder he should have the body of Edwin Westfield to experiment on. It was a horrible, brutal, bargain, but you were then past all feeling of decency."

"Get on," said Miller. "I find your story quite interesting."

"So this mad doctor prepared a death-mask, and the mourning widow and daughter wept over this counterfeit of the face of the husband and father. It was an awful thing to do, Miller. An awful thing. I can hardly contain myself when I think of it."

"Proof! Proof!" howled Miller.

Nick took the mask from his pocket.

"Here is part of it," he said.

Miller gasped and turned his face away.

"I knew nothing of this," he said. "Where did you get that thing?"

"At the family vault."

"It is all the work of that mad devil."

"We shall see about that later on. You brought this mad doctor into the house, probably with the purpose of eventually sealing his lips with a dose of his own poison, but he was too cunning for you. He grew crazier day by day, and was finally kept at the top of the house."

"Then you turned the stocks and bonds of the estate into currency, planning a life abroad, and hid the currency in this house. Where you placed it I do not know, but the mad doctor knew, for he watched you. When you were away he removed the money and refused to tell you where he had placed it."

"That is true," said Miller, "about the only true thing you have said to-night. I brought what little money I had saved from the wreck here and he stole it."

"You brought five or six million dollars here," said Nick, "and it is somewhere in this house now, and we shall find it."

"Then I shall claim it."

"You will not need it," replied Nick significantly.

Miller winced under the words.

"There are courts of law," he said, "where all these things must be proven."

Nick turned to his assistant.

"Open the private wine-vault," he said.

Chick hesitated.

Miller leaned forward anxiously.

"A private wine-vault?" he said.

Chick finally swung the heavy door open.

"Now," said Nick, "go in with both our lanterns and illuminate the place."

Chick shivered, but obeyed.

Then Nick took the cringing attorney by the shoulders and forced him through the narrow opening.

A cry of fright rang through the place as his eyes fell upon what was inside, upon that which had so moved both detectives earlier in the night.

This is what he saw:

Edwin Westfield, apparently in life and health, sat at a small table. In a box before him were a number of

round pellets. At his side was a glass partly filled with water. A little to the left was a bottle of water.

Miller fairly groveled at the feet of the detectives.

"Take me out of here," he cried, "and I will confess everything. For the love of Heaven do not keep me in this awful place."

"Here is the proof," said Nick, pointing at the dead man. "Your mad doctor did his work well. He reproduced the scene of death, little knowing that he himself would lie dead but a few feet away."

"Come," said Chick. "Let us go. This place is too much for me."

"Wait a minute," said Nick.

The detective threw the water out of the glass, partly filled it from the bottle, and dropped one of the round pellets into it.

The capsule dissolved instantly, and a greenish liquid showed in the glass.

"Deadly poison," said Nick. "It is the poison that killed Edwin Westfield."

"I don't see how you got next to all this," said Chick.

"The capsules and the pans of acid in the room told the story of the experiments," replied Nick, "and when we came here I broke open one of the pellets the mad doctor had left here. Then I made a test and found how quickly the water in the bottle would dissolve the capsule, while other water would not touch it. That bottle is the one from which Edwin Westfield drank on the night of his death. It is the one he kept in the hidden closet in the library."

"What a notion it was to reproduce the scene of the murder," said Chick.

"Come, come!" groaned Miller. "I have told you the truth now. Take me away."

"Now," said Nick, "during your trial for this murder you must never mention the fact that the body of Edwin Westfield was not buried in the regular way. I will see that it is placed in the vault, and the matter ends there. The widow and daughter must never know."

"There will be no trial," groaned Miller.

Before the detectives could prevent him, the miserable man grasped several of the deadly pellets from the table and swallowed them. He was dead in an instant—dead by his own hand and by the means used to murder another.

"We must send for the coroner," said Chick, "and have this matter cleared up, but first I have something to show you."

He turned to the wall of the wine-vault and threw aside a pile of rubbish which had seemingly collected there. Then he pointed to an excavation at his feet.

"I, too, learned something in the wine-vault," he said. "Here is the money which was stolen from the Westfield estate, returned at last to its owners. Will any form of law be necessary to restore it to the widow?"

"No," was the reply. "It is enough that it was found here. Come, the coroner and the undertaker have work to do here. But we must bring the body out of the vault and leave the money hidden until we can care for it."

"And Mrs. Westfield and Nellie?"

"They must be told that we were successful in recovering the fortune, and that is sufficient," replied Nick. And so ended the Westfield case.

THE END.

The next issue of NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 491, will contain "The Gold-Lettered Dagger; or, Nick Carter's Most Tragic Case." Out next week.

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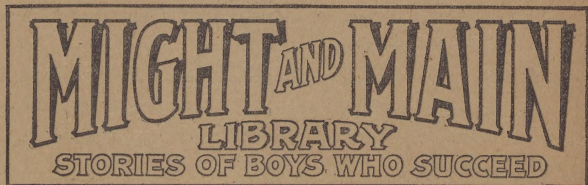
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